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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 008483

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [AG](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: GOF CONTINUES TO DECLINE COMMENT ON BOUTEFLIKA'S HEALTH

REF: A. ALGIERS 2438

[1](#)B. ALGIERS 2364

[1](#)C. ALGIERS 2348

[1](#)D. EMAIL ZEYA-MCNICHOLAS 11/30/05

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) The GoF continues to stonewall on the health situation of Algerian President Bouteflika, who has been hospitalized in Paris since November 27 (reftels). During a December 13 discussion with poloff, MFA DAS-equivalent for the Maghreb Christian Testot reiterated he could provide no information on Bouteflika's health, beyond confirming that the Algerian president's condition is serious and that he underwent an operation. Testot stressed that he could not speculate on how much longer Bouteflika would require hospitalization in France or the cause of his illness, and repeated the established GoF policy of deferring all questions on Bouteflika's health to the Algerian government.

[1](#)2. (C) Testot conceded that Bouteflika's hospitalization had complicated GoF efforts to conclude a friendship treaty with Algiers, and that the GoF would not meet its goal of concluding this accord by year-end. He insisted, though, that the friendship treaty is not blocked, despite continued controversy over the February 23, 2005 French law which called on French textbooks to recognize the "positive role" of French colonialism, especially in North Africa. (Note: A prominent French-Algerian political activist told us he had heard directly from the Algerian government that the friendship treaty is indeed blocked, over GoF refusal to include an apology for colonization of Algeria in the text. End note.)

[1](#)3. (C) Testot commented that whoever succeeded Bouteflika would not have the same "political capital" and would therefore be less able to make concessions on GoA demands for a French apology for colonialism, which the GoF thus far refused to offer; Testot quickly clarified that he wasn't suggesting that Bouteflika's demise was imminent. He added that the February 2005 law had now become a domestic controversy in France, with a small minority of French repatriates from Algeria using their influence within the ruling UMP party to ensure retention of the February 2005 law, notwithstanding calls for the law's abrogation by the opposition Socialist party and protests against it in French overseas territories. Testot concluded that the February 2005 law was "absurd," but would not be withdrawn. PM de Villepin recently announced that he had no apologies to make for French history.

[1](#)3. (C) Comment: Testot did not make any effort to put a positive spin on Bouteflika's health or suggest that the Algerian leader's release from the hospital is imminent. The GoF's relative silence on Bouteflika's illness contrasts with its approach to the November 2004 hospitalization of Arafat, during which we received detailed updates on Arafat's condition and the GoF was the main spokesperson to the international media. It is clear that the GoF wants to avoid further problems in its relations with Algiers, already complicated by the controversy over the February 2005 law and delayed conclusion of the friendship treaty. An offhand press remark by FM Douste-Blazy December 11, in which he said "he could not say" what was wrong with the Algerian president, touched off a fresh wave of speculation in the French media that Bouteflika's condition is much more serious than GoF and GoA officials have suggested. End comment.

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Stapleton